



**PIERLUISI REQUESTS CONGRESSIONAL HEARING REGARDING
VIEQUES WITH ORLANDO CONGRESSMAN
*Monday, April 20, 2009***

WASHINGTON, DC- The Resident Commissioner in Washington, Pedro Pierluisi, today asked the House Committee on Science and Technology's Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight to conduct public hearings in Puerto Rico in order to examine the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's (ATSDR) assessment that there was "no apparent public health hazard" to the residents of Vieques from contamination caused by the military's former use of this island.

Today's request—directed to Subcommittee Chairman Brad Miller—was made jointly with Orlando Congressman Alan Grayson.

"The residents of Vieques have high rates of disease compared to the people of the main island of Puerto Rico. Studies have shown heavy metals and other contaminants in soil, plants and shellfish in Vieques.

The link between the U.S. military's use of Vieques for many decades and the health problems currently being experienced by the island's residents has been the subject of substantial debate in recent years. It is a subject that is of deep interest—and concern—to both of us, " the letter states.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) placed Vieques on the National Priorities List in February 2005. ATSDR is responsible for conducting health assessments at sites that are on the National Priorities List.

Between 2001 and 2003, the agency made four public health assessments in Vieques, examining four potential "pathways" through which human exposure to contamination might occur: air, soil, drinking water and groundwater, and the consumption of fish and shellfish. In each instance, the agency concluded that "there [was] no apparent public health hazard."

"The ATSDR has established five categories of public health hazard findings, ranging from "No Public Health Hazard" to "Urgent Public Health Hazard." A finding of "No Apparent Public Health Hazard" does not deny that individuals at, or in the vicinity of, a contaminated site are experiencing health effects. Rather, this finding indicates that available information does not prove scientifically that exposure to a specific contaminant, or a combination of contaminants, is the definitive cause of health effects that may be experienced by individuals, Pierluisi said.

Separate non-ATSDR studies, however, have questioned the conclusions of the ATSDR, asserting a more definitive link between the Navy's past activities and the health problems being experienced by the island's residents.

"For this reason, we believe that a field hearing will help Congress understand the public health issues in Vieques and to fairly assess whether the ATSDR conducted itself in appropriate fashion in this particular case," Pierluisi and Grayson said in their letter.

During these hearings, the letter stated, members of the Subcommittee will have the opportunity to hear from residents of Vieques, the authors of the non-ATSDR studies, and ATSDR officials themselves.

<http://pierluisi.house.gov>